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## Editorial

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### A Crisis of Confidence?

The machinations surrounding the nomination of Jacques Santer to be President of the next Commission – less than wholeheartedly supported by the European Parliament – have reflected very badly on the national politicians involved in the whole business. There have been suggestions that certain candidates played their cards badly: Lubbers in particular could have been clearer earlier about his candidature. Yet let there be no doubt that much of the odium must be due to the manner in which the Franco-German alliance attempted to bulldoze through its preferred candidate (who may in fact do Europe a greater service by holding the Belgian government together). Whilst the realities of political influence and the variations in political weight may mean that certain Member States expect to make their voices heard above the throng, the Community is far more than a mere alliance of the interests of two Member States: it is also not a servant of any one Member State, although there are those who seem to regard the Commission as a political football rather than an independent institution with its own political responsibility. Bemused contempt appears to be the appropriate reaction to the attempted fix, the veto, and the emergence of a dark horse compromise and rather maligned nominee. The very real threat of non-cooperation by the European Parliament has perhaps reminded politicians that some care will be necessary in the choice of the other members of the Commission. According to Article 158(2) EC the President and other members nominated will be subject as a body to a vote of approval by the Parliament; their appointment by common accord of the governments of the Member States cannot proceed without Parliamentary approval. Accordingly, the road

is not yet wholly clear for the nominee as President. In this process, and despite (or perhaps even because of) the fact that the June 1994 elections seem to have reflected a global European yawn, the Parliament will have no hesitation in making full use of its new powers. Thus the very narrow majority by which the Parliament accepted the nomination of Jacques Santer should be seen as a very strong and accurate warning shot across the bows of the nomination process. Formally, the Parliament has to be consulted even before the nomination of the person whom the governments intend to appoint. In reality, it is not terribly surprising that a single name is put to the Parliament, although it would have been perfectly possible for the governments to ask the Parliament's views on a number of candidates, before nominating the intended appointee. If the Parliament's views were then to be ignored, it would then still be able to refuse to approve the Commission as a body. That option is open to it in any event. However, given the lack of party discipline in the political groups in the Parliament (as was apparent in the vote for Jacques Santer) the stage is set for yet more wheeling and dealing. The crisis of confidence may have disappeared (at least temporarily) at the level of the politicians. But it remains at the level of the electorate, whose low level of confidence in politics and politicians, is appropriate to the lack of vision presently presented to them.

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